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Devotional
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"MEN OUGHT TO PRAY"

Prayer is the soul's sincere desire,
Unuttered or expressed
The motion of a hidden fire,
That burns within the breast.

When Jesus said, "Men ought to pray," He voiced from God to man an eternal, elemental and essential obligation. Prayer is an obligation inherent in the moral constitution of man. "God is Spirit, and seeketh such to worship Him as worship Him in spirit and in truth." Obligation means duty. It is man's duty to pray. The old English method of spelling duty was d-u-e-t-y. What is due to God; what is due to man? It is due God that men pray. It is due man, both one's self and one's fellows, that men pray. So elemental and essential a necessity is prayer, that when Jesus said "Men ought to pray" it was as if a physician should tell us of the simplest and most imperative natural duties. It is as if he should say "Men ought to breathe," so men ought to pray. "Men ought to eat," so also men ought to pray. Men ought to exercise, men ought to love. These things are elemental in human life. So is prayer and men ought to pray. Just as man must breathe to live, so spiritual man must pray in order to live. As man must eat in order to renew strength for daily tasks of labor and burden bearing, so men must pray for similar tasks of the soul. As man must exercise; that the muscles may

be kept supple, so must the soul through prayer keep itself supple. As love neglected, discounted will soon die, so prayer, neglected and treated contemptuously in life, will bring to the soul death inescapable. From every vital consideration of spiritual life and moral necessity, it needs to be repeated over and over: Men ought to pray. But why?

First: Prayer is the expression of the soul's relation to God. We are told in the 8th chapter of Romans that if we have been born of the spirit of God, we have His witness with our spirits that we are children of God, and we cry "Abba Father." It is a well-known physiological fact that the very first act of a new born babe is a cry. That is the universal volapuk. In whatever language, under whatever sun, from whatever race the child comes, he greets the world, not with a smile, nor a coo, but a cry. Only that, strange as it may seem, will bring air into the organs prepared for it in the body. Upon that air the child first lives. It is the breath of life. God inbreathes into his body to make him a living soul. The alternate contraction and expansion of the diaphragm is an absolute necessity. It at once voices and establishes for the child a living relation to the world into which he has been born, and in which he is to live, if he lives physically at all. So nothing but a cry from the soul up to God voices and establishes a right living relation between the soul and God. By this he gives expression to his new birth into the kingdom, to his vital

coming into, establishment in and life within the spiritual realm. There is no other means by which the redeemed soul so certainly proves the fact of its regeneration, as by spontaneous, habitual, vital prayer. Nothing else so certainly as the absence of prayer proves conclusive the absence of that spiritual experience which Christ describes when he says "You must be born again."

Second: Prayer is necessary to perfect the purpose of God in the world. We are told in the book of Revelation that the judgment will reveal the bottled up prayers of the saints, as a sweet incense in the nostrils of God. Holy men have always prayed. Elijah prayed and through the medium of prayer alone, even as he controlled the elements by which the rain fell or was restrained, he controlled those turbid passions of the souls of men that led the nations to live away from, or into subjection of almighty God. So had Moses prayed when upon the mount of his disappointment, he sat in the breach between Israel and God, and gained for them by intercessions, a new chance and a new blessing. So in later days Hezekiah prayed when sickness had fallen upon him and disaster upon his people. The hand of God seems to wait upon the heart of man, and the purpose of God upon his prayers. Our Lord Jesus Christ, sending eleven Galilean peasants out to make conquest of the world in His name, told them in effect that reinforcements for the task assigned to them depended upon them; upon their willingness to pray and

upon their activity in prayer. Did he not say, "Pray ye the Lord of the harvest to thrust laborers into the field?"

Yet in the face of this tremendous condition, and the issues at stake upon its fulfillment, the Christian church is today a prayerless institution. And the average Christian man is a prayerless being. Passing down the street the other day, I saw a wagon truck with one wheel off. The motor was working. There was ample power. The truck was itself making some progress, but under the axel from which the wheel had been broken, there was a two by four scantling, and the truck that ought to have run, and been capable of bearing a load, was limping and halting and able to carry only itself—a disappointment to its driver, an expense to its owner and an object of contempt to every observer. So the prayerless individual or the prayerless church, whatever its other equipment may be, is minus a wheel and it goes limping and halting, concerned with its own life, its own integrity, its own burdens of pain, anxiety and inefficiency, and is useless in the fulfillment of God's purpose and in the discharging of life's duties.

Men ought to pray. Prayer should be both individual and social. It should be spontaneous and habitual. It should be earnest and thoughtful. It should be in the spirit and in the understanding. It should be intelligent, orderly and presented in the thoughtfulness of the minutest detail. Men ought to pray, for prayer is necessary against life's odds. We

are all situated in the midst of perplexities, doubts, fears, anxieties and problems. Our present situation under any circumstances is the result of cumulative forces from all directions in the past and present. Tolstoi, in his philosophy of the Causes of War, brings beyond any question, that national problems are the result always of inescapable cumulative forces. So are all the soul problems which confront us; so are the perplexities which arise from the blind and unexplained forces which surround us. No human wisdom is sufficient for safe guidance through the maze of mystery with which we are surrounded. Sorrows come and overwhelm; doubts arise and overshadow; fear grips the heart, nameless and causeless, but real none the less. Whither shall we turn, where shall we go, what council obey, what wisdom follow? What is the true path of duty, of wisdom and right? One may not know. God surely knows. Men ought to pray.

Prayer, vital prayer, in the soul of a Christian, is like a searchlight on the bridge of a ship, as the ship feels out its way through darkened harbors, surrounded always by other crafts seeking their way in the confusion of cross purposes, dangers and uncertainty of the way. The searchlight picks out the path, reveals the way and guides in safety midst all odds and opposing dangers. So prayer for the soul picks out of all perplexities of life's unilluminated way, a safe and sure path. Oh there are times when we cannot do anything

but pray. When but for the right and the power to send up a cry to God the soul would break in its burden. Thank God we can pray. We are invited to come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy, and find help in every time of need. Men who lack wisdom must ask the God who giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not. Men ought to pray.

Pray always. Pray without ceasing. There are intermittent springs that flow from the hill sides, only after seasons of great rainfall. They flow for a while and gladden the underlying fields below. But soon their flow stops and the land is parched. The cattle that come to drink go lowing away in their thirst and there is naught but disappointment. There are souls who pray only during seasons of spiritual or evangelistic gatherings. Then follows a spiritual famine. There is no voice. The soul sits in silence all the day. God seems to be far off and there is no melody and no refreshment, but only disappointment and spiritual stagnation. The heat of temptation sends its blight abroad, and men perish under it because they forget to pray. There are perennial springs that flow always from the hillside, from which birds and beasts drink and grains all catch their richness and freshness, and grow unstinted with the developing vitality of a resourceful life. These springs feed upon the eternal moisture of the hills that gather into their storehouses and hold in reservoir the rains and snows of all seasons,

sending them down in unbroken flow on the dependent fields that lie below. There are souls that hold unbroken fellowship through prayer with God. Come dearth or danger, come pestilence or famine, come stress and strain, whatever may betide, nothing changes the sure circumstances of the abounding grace of God. That is the history of grace and life and power through prayer. Men ought to pray.

Be in the attitude of prayer. Bring life into vital connections with God, and prayer will be natural and easy and usual. Daniel prayed three times a day with windows opened toward the east that all the world who would look might see. He prayed when he understood what the cost of prayer was to be. Daniel prayed, and because he prayed had the courage not to defile himself with the dainties set upon the table by the lust of a heathen king. David prayed ten times a day, and out of his prayer flowed the poetic expressions of a soul so beautiful in harmony with God that all the world, trusting God, has found David's experience its own experience. How poor our prayerless lives are. Niagara has permitted the harnessing of its power. Men have availed themselves of that privilege and 160,000 horse power has been harnessed. But they have left unharnessed 3,600,000 horse power. How poor they are in comparison to the riches of power they might have. So we who pray a little and rejoice in the gracious God's answer to prayer, need to consider how little we do

pray, and how poor in relative possession of power our souls are. To pray with a spirit and an understanding, to pray as Jesus prayed and as He meant us to pray when He said, "Men ought to pray," is to link our lives to infinity, and to find that with us also, all things are possible through Christ Who strengtheneth us.

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